



Ensuring Talent for the Future with Leadership Development that Drives Performance

There was a new CEO at the helm of the company and an ambitious new agenda, but not enough leadership talent to get the job done.



OUR CLIENTS SUCCEED



The Challenge

In a time of significant change, a company's executive team acknowledged a critical need to ensure strong leadership for the future. They committed to a plan to lay the foundation for a new performance culture and new ranks of promising leaders. The result in six months was a group of leaders ready to advance into senior leadership roles, 25% of whom were promoted immediately.

The Objectives

The client organization had recently experienced leadership change at the very top of the organization, with a new Chief Executive Officer replacing a long-standing CEO. In addition, the executive team had agreed on an ambitious strategy that represented a significant departure from the traditional business they had run in years past.

There was great potential for the organization moving forward, but accessing that potential would call for new ranks of upcoming leaders capable of making bold commitments and delivering extraordinary results.

The executive team saw a gap in terms of capabilities and in the number of individuals qualified to move into more senior leadership roles. The key objectives of the executive team were to (1) strengthen the leadership skills of those identified as the next generation of leaders and to (2) increase the size of the talent pool of those qualified to move into leadership roles at the next level.

Generally speaking, next-level leaders in the company were experienced and competent, but also typically made "safe," low-risk decisions, largely setting forth objectives only after careful analysis and planning. Intervention would be required

to solidify a critical mass of individuals capable of strong, courageous leadership. The challenge at hand was to ensure the organization's talent for the future, while also delivering a step change in performance.

The Work

The development of a leadership framework to articulate and clarify desired competencies identified six priority areas of development for the company, four of which involved leadership. JMW was hired because of a track record for impacting people's behaviors and approaches to their day-to-day work as leaders. The distinction made by the executives who selected JMW was expressed as a need to shift the way people act and behave, which they saw as a key JMW area of expertise, versus having participants "learning about leadership" in a more theoretical, less actionable way.

In the context of a larger "talent agenda" put in place by the organization, the company identified a group of managers with the potential and aspiration to advance into senior leadership roles. These 24 individuals were enrolled in a Breakthrough Leadership Program designed by JMW to help build the company's talent pipeline.

The Breakthrough Leadership Program was an intervention that focused on developing leadership behaviors and capabilities, as well as making a dramatic impact with learnings that would "live in the job." In other words, the principles and approaches covered in the program would have direct relevance to the leaders' real-time challenges and objectives, and translate to tools and skills they could begin to implement immediately.

The curriculum consisted of 3 four-day sessions over six months, with one-on-one coaching during and after sessions. Each participant also committed to and pursued a "breakthrough project" focused on objectives relevant to their day-to-day responsibilities and overarching commitments, reinforcing the program's "learning in action" approach.

Six months after the company committed to developing its next generation of promising leaders, 25% of the program participants were promoted immediately, and 70% have now moved on to more senior roles.

The program work challenged participants to shift their perspectives, revealed limitations and gave people tools to transcend them, deepened individuals' ability to influence and inspire others, and strengthened their capabilities to take new actions and commit to unprecedented results.

The Results

Readiness

A survey of participants showed that the vast majority rated their readiness for promotion in the organization as "high" or "extremely high." Overwhelmingly, they reported:

- An increase in self-awareness and confidence
- A shift in seeing greater leadership possibilities for themselves and having a greater impact on others
- Benefits from collaboration and relationship-building across functional and organizational boundaries

Breakthrough Projects

In keeping with the objectives of the program, several participants' breakthrough projects succeeded in delivering results beyond incremental improvement. For example:

- One participant took on doubling sales growth from £25 million to £50 million within three years. After one year, he was on track to deliver the result and was promoted to a more senior position.
- Another participant took on a further costs reduction (over and above an already ambitious cost reduction target) of £8 million, and achieved that result within the fiscal year.

A Step Change in Perspective

The leadership development effort proved to be leverage for a step change in approach and performance.

- Participants expressed a significant shift in their willingness to commit to an objective in advance of knowing exactly how they would achieve it. As one participant put it: "I am more willing to take on projects and tasks which will stretch me and that I don't have all the answers to."

- The vast majority of graduates also said they believe they are now making a much larger contribution to the business as a direct result of the program. As one graduate said:

"I am fundamentally in the same role, but I do believe I am making a greater contribution and am better placed within my team to take on new roles and challenges."

A New Leadership Pipeline

The executive team's objective of securing new leadership talent for the future was achieved.

The success of the effort led the company to invest in subsequent Breakthrough Leadership Programs for managers with the potential and aspiration to advance into senior leadership roles.

- Overall executive team succession coverage increased by 20%
- 70% of participants have now moved into senior roles
- 25% of participants were promoted by the completion of the program or immediately thereafter

Following the unprecedented success of the program and due to unusually positive feedback from participants, the company subsequently requested JMW to provide programs for the next eight years. Overall, approximately 150 leaders were empowered to take on expanded leadership roles. They reported that they were better equipped to deal with continued changes in strategy including a significant merger as a result of their JMW experience.

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